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by

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**Bringing Life to Life: Cultivating Authenticity, Freedom, and Holistic
Integration in the Art and Practice of Acting**

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**Bringing Life to Life: Cultivating Authenticity, Freedom, and Holistic
Integration in the Art and Practice of Acting**

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the teachers who have ever inspired me. I developed a life-long love affair with learning because of each of you; I would be nowhere without your guidance, heart, and wisdom.

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Abstract

Bringing Life to Life: Cultivating Authenticity, Freedom, and Holistic Integration in the Art and Practice of Acting

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This MFA thesis document explores the development of my acting craft and artistic development over a three-year period of intensive graduate training. The document includes an in-depth discussion of the preparation, rehearsal, and performance process of my culminating graduate production – Suzan Zeder’s *The Edge of Peace* – as it relates to my approaches to acting. The document also includes a discussion of various other areas of my acting process, including the importance of bringing my authentic self to every role, letting go of results, and the integration of body, voice, heart, and mind as well as the productions and experiences in my graduate work that proved essential to the development of these practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Don't be an actor. Be a human being who works off what exists under imaginary circumstances. Don't give a performance. Let the performance give you.
Sanford Meisner, *On Acting*

It is my first year acting class with Professor Lucien Douglas, and I am doing a yin-yang Meisner improvisation with my colleague Dan Lenzian. We are playing Betsy and Karl, our first act characters from the play we are currently rehearsing, Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park*. We are improvising a moment in Betsy and Karl's lives that would have happened before the play began; the exercise's guidelines dictate that we each create a loaded imaginary circumstance that requires deep emotional preparation, without letting our partner know what we have chosen. While bustling around the apartment, waiting with excited anticipation to share with my husband the news that I am pregnant, Dan as Karl comes through the door with a black eye, bruises, and blood dripping down his shirt. He is visibly shaken and near tears. When he enters the room to tell me that a group of students at his school had brutally beat him in the parking lot, I respond immediately and burst into tears without thinking. I am fully committed to the moment, fully in my body, and deeply concerned over what had happened to my husband.

This was the most authentic moment I had experienced to date in acting; for the first time I felt as if I was truly riding the wave of the scene. The chatter in my mind ceased, I gave up monitoring my progress, my only focus was my partner, and I felt fully in my body – all without *trying* to make anything happen. I felt like myself and like Betsy at the same time. I felt centered in my own body and voice but as if I was looking

through Betsy's eyes, all while pursuing my deep need to take care of my husband. I had never felt more open as an artist; it was if all of the skin, bones, tissue, and psychological blocks that covered my heart had melted away and I was able to allow Dan/Karl's heart, energy and words to resonate deeply and immediately.

Director, actor, and movement specialist Mark Olsen likens this form of creative flow to a spiritual experience in *The Golden Buddha Changing Masks*:

The ability for an actor to step into another reality fully and to allow his instrument to respond, free of social restraint, free of self-doubt, free of anything but the genuine flow of energy within the given circumstances of the performative event, is nearly identical to the ritual and prayerful and meditative conditions of all religious practices (Olsen 22).

In the scene I felt as if energy was flowing through me and that I was being guided by a creative force beyond myself. The experience was indeed spiritual. During and after the thrilling improvisation I felt blissful and free, and I became hungry to ignite more feelings of transcendence in my art. I wondered: How do I create this again? How do I, as Meisner urges, let the "performance give (me)" *all* the time? What kind of craft do I need to develop that will support this type of work? How do I examine and study these moments of creative freedom so I can replicate them without losing the feelings of spontaneity and vitality?

British Director Declan Donnellan asserts in his treatise on acting, *The Actor and the Target* that "the more life there is present in a work of art, the greater" that work is (3). Thus, the actor's task is to cultivate the craft tools that inspire the most possible amount of life onstage. This thesis will address the paths I have taken to find the tools

and processes that bring the maximum amount of vitality and presence to my acting. Specifically, how bringing the practices of my authentic self to the role, letting go of results, and integrating my body, voice, heart, and mind allow me to be the “human being (working) off of imaginary circumstances” that Meisner wisely demands of actors. The first part of this thesis will include an in-depth exploration of my preparation, rehearsal, and performance process playing June in *The Edge of Peace*, the culminating production in my graduate training. The second part of this thesis will discuss other aspects of my artistic process, as well as productions and experiences in my graduate work that proved essential to my development as an actor.

CHAPTER ONE: The Edge of Peace

INTRODUCTION

I began rehearsal for Suzan Zeder's *The Edge of Peace*, a world premiere co-production for young audiences between The University of Texas at Austin and Seattle Children's Theatre, on January 4, 2013 at the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin. The cast included five MFA actors, one UT professor, and five professional actors from Seattle and Chicago. Linda Hartzel, the artistic director of Seattle Children's Theatre, directed the piece; UT faculty member Rusty Cloyes served as stage manager, and playwright and UT faculty member Suzan Zeder was an active participant in the rehearsal room throughout the process. After playing the show for two weeks in Austin, the cast took a two-week hiatus before traveling to Seattle Children's Theatre in Seattle, WA. After two days of technical rehearsals, the show reopened for the public on March 1 and played eight show weeks for audiences of families and elementary and middle school-aged students.

The Edge of Peace is the culminating play in Suzan Zeder's acclaimed "Ware" trilogy exploring deaf and hearing characters set against the decades of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s in small town America. The preceding plays, *Mother Hicks* and *A Taste of Sunrise*, are seminal plays in the development of theatre for young audiences, and both premiered at Seattle Children's Theatre. The trilogy chronicles outsiders Nell Hicks, Tuc, and Girl through various aspects of their lives in the town of Ware, a real

community in Southern Illinois on which Zeder based the plays. *The Edge of Peace* is set over the course of the final year of World War II and centers on the experience of an eleven-year-old boy, Buddy Ricks, whose brother Ricky is fighting overseas. I played the role of June Ricks, Ricky's young wife.

I bring my acting tools and craft foundation to every project and subsequently adapt my process each time. As Yoshi Oida writes in *The Invisible Actor*, "each production requires its own personal 'acting method'" (120). There are a variety of tools I find consistently helpful, but with each project my rituals, methods, and access points change according to what I intuit will most effectively serve my individual contribution to the larger process. My work is most successful when I am flexible and adaptable to the needs of my collaborators and to those of the production, without sacrificing my own values and beliefs as an artist. Because each play process varies so distinctly, I find it essential that my tools be malleable; though what follows is a discussion of my specific process for *The Edge of Peace*, there is nothing fixed or representative about the experience as it is singularly different than all of the other roles I have developed during my time in graduate school and in the professional world. Nevertheless, I have developed certain artistic practices that support me universally in my work, and will discuss these discoveries in the subsequent sections.

PREPARING FOR REHEARSAL

I began my preparation for *The Edge of Peace* by embarking on research, script

analysis, and a variety of other explorations that allowed me to craft a vision of the world through June's eyes. During my pre-rehearsal process I focused on developing June's point of view, in order to be able to "step through" her "senses...and intuit the changing universe" in which she exists, as Donnellan describes in *The Actor and the Target* (83). In *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner writes that while in the role the actor is "not (herself), but (she) is not not (herself) at the same time" (248-249). In this document I will speak and write about my character in the first person, but I am in agreement with Schechner and Donnellan that I am both myself and the character at the same time. Thus, I find it more useful to think in terms of *receiving* the character and allowing her point of view to enter my body and voice rather than "creating" a role outside of myself that I have to "put on."

This process of receiving my character and beginning to see the world through her eyes is intimate, spiritual, elusive, unpredictable, and deeply personal. In her seminal work, *A Director Prepares*, director Anne Bogart advises artists against the dangerous tendency to "produce results," and, rather, encourages the creation of "circumstances in which something might happen" (124). Bogart's idea of releasing control resonates deeply with my process of developing a role; I will kill the vitality I hope to live onstage if I make any decisions about some type of result. Thus, in my process of preparing the role, the best thing I can do is to create the "circumstances" for myself in which the greatest number of discoveries may be possible. I can never predict how I will receive the character, and have found that it happens in all spaces – not just in pre-rehearsal preparation or rehearsal time, but while I am brushing my teeth, going grocery shopping,

dreaming, and potentially doing any activity in my daily life. Sometimes I receive messages (either in June's voice or my own or some elusive combination of the two); these moments of inspiration can happen at any time, but curiously often when I am not focusing directly on the work. For me it is essential to do other activities during a rehearsal process. Often my most intense moments of clarity occur while I am engaged in activities completely separate from the theatre.

Research

My research for this production proved deeply significant in my artistic process. I approach the research process intuitively and emotionally. I surround myself with a variety of sources and then move in the direction of images, facts, and details that move me. I only use research to the point that it releases my imagination and have found this to be a tremendously helpful tool in specifying and deepening environment and character. Primary and secondary historical sources have the potential to unearth powerful questions that unlock truths and details about characters I might not otherwise discover.

I begin with overviews of the world of the play to identify anything that sparks discoveries, emotional responses, and gut reactions, and then pursue those areas that activate my instincts more specifically. For *The Edge of Peace* I watched documentaries such as Ken Burns' *The War*, World War II era propaganda shorts, and period films including *A League of Their Own*, as well as reading articles and secondary sources about American life on the home front. I immersed myself with visual representations of the period and selected advertising images and historical photographs that activated my

instincts (See Appendix). I began listening to music of the period and found songs that specifically resonated with me as June. Bing Crosby's *There'll be a Hot Time in the Time of New York* activated a powerful emotional response because I had imagined that one of June and Ricky's dreams was to go to New York. I had imagined that Ricky had promised June that they would run away there when he returned, and thus the song activated her longing both for Ricky and for getting out of Ware. The Mills Brothers' *Paper Doll* also brought up thoughts about Ricky. The song makes me imagine him sitting in a bunker, dreaming about seeing me (as June) again.

An important aspect of my research illuminated rituals of writing, receiving, and delivering letters. These rituals proved particularly useful and poignant in understanding this time period in comparison to the accessibility and immediacy of communication in contemporary times. I located over two hundred letters my grandfather had written to my grandmother during wartime, as well as my grandmother's line a day diary that provided accounts that matched the letters. (See Appendix) I found the reading of the letters, the physical experience of holding them, and the accompanying photographs particularly useful to the development of my role as it provided both primary source material as well as a powerful emotional connection for me personally. During the course of the play I read Ricky's letters multiple times onstage. Having the experience of reading my grandparents' actual correspondence was a powerful emotional key in those moments.

The complicated and contrasting feelings women experienced during wartime emerged as another powerful theme from my research. Women's feelings of sadness and

longing for men overseas occur frequently in WWII narratives, but sources like *A League of Their Own* illuminate the opportunities war offered women, and specifically those to participate in traditionally male work. June works at the Goodyear factory, and the research helped craft my point of view that working at Goodyear, though potentially exhausting, might actually be enjoyable. Another theme that emerged from my research was the need for women to appear strong – both for their families and for the country – while feeling deep internal anxiety and fear. This proved especially helpful in the scene when the Ware community receives a telegram that Ricky has died. After we receive the news, my mother-in-law Izzy, asks: “Oh, June, what are we going to do?” I respond to her by saying: “Come into my house, I’ll make us some tea” (Zeder 44). My research helped illuminate my need to appear strong for Izzy, even though I may feel broken and destroyed internally. The open expression of feelings to loved ones is a common practice in modern times, but my research indicated that this type of vulnerability was more rare to a generation that lived through the Depression and World War II.

In one of his letters, my grandfather addressed a concern of my grandmother’s about his drinking too much at military parties and events. My grandfather’s response attempted to allay her anxiety, but there was a sense that he was using deliberate and slightly condescending language to paint a picture of his life that might not be wholly honest. This exchange between my grandparents allowed me to discover a sense of unease that June might have about Ricky’s experience, due to the fact that the letters home were the sole source of information. The distrust I sensed in whatever my grandmother’s original concern may have been brought up powerful questions in relation

to the reading of Ricky's letters: Does he really miss me as much as he says he does? Are there other women that are temptations? What are his real feelings about being away? These insights helped me load the stakes of receiving the letters, and sparked the discovery that receiving them – though filled with anxiety – was absolutely the highlight of June's days. I also imagined what I might write back to Ricky and then used the act of writing return letters as a form of emotional preparation during the rehearsal process.

To me, research and preparation in a rehearsal process feels like scattering a bunch of seeds in a fertile land plot, watering them occasionally but mostly leaving them alone for a while. I cannot predict which seeds will grow and my trying to control the process will constipate my work. I thus attempted to release the research into my subconscious, and allowed it to inform the development of June's point of view spontaneously.

Script Analysis and Crafting a Point of View

I read the script multiple times in the early stages of preparation, making notes on the given circumstances, what other characters say about me, questions, inferences, operative lines, and my point of view on other characters. I am constantly refining and deepening my views of the other characters in the play, as this point of view is the basis for determining my character's needs. To help clarify these needs I ask myself (as my character): *what do I want the most in the world? Who would I like to be?* And, conversely, *who am I afraid I am and what do I fear the most?* I come to rehearsal

prepared with my needs for each scene, what I believe the obstacles to be, and how I will attempt to work for these needs through action. I find it useful to partake in thorough and specific at-home preparation for beginning rehearsals, though I allow my choices to be fluid and adaptable as I make discoveries with the director and other actors.

Crafting a specific point of view from inside the premise of the character has become a foundational aspect of how I approach acting. I examined the play for the audience's point of view/understanding of the story, but then determined how June sees the world, the people around her, and herself. As Declan Donnellan asserts in *The Actor and the Target*, actors must play their roles from the "inside" of the character "looking out," being careful not to play from the "outside looking in" (61). Throughout the process I deepened, altered, and specified my point of view on other characters, events, and circumstances. I am not prepared for rehearsal until I have clarified my points of view, because it is from this specific and personal vantage point that I must listen to my scene partners.

I then went through the text carefully and identified the people to whom I am speaking in each scene. As Donnellan writes, "you can never know what you're doing until you first know what you are doing it to" (17). Though a seemingly obvious task for an actor, I found the identification of these people quite useful in this process since nearly all of my scenes included a group of at least three and usually more characters onstage at once. The script did not always specify to whom I was speaking, and the danger of the scenes was to speak the lines to a generalized group and for no reason in particular. It

was therefore crucial to identify intended listeners for all of my lines.

After I identified the characters to whom I was speaking, I asked myself, “what do I see in them and how do I feel about them in this moment?” and then, “what do I need them to do in this scene and what are they doing/believing that I need to change?” Using this technique, I examine all of the scenes and moments and ask myself: I say this line in order to do what and to whom do I do it? As Donnellan writes, “all text is a tool to change what the target is already doing” (69). Only after I have identified my specific point of view on my scene partners can I identify what I need them to do. Once I have identified what I need my scene partners to do/think/believe, I determine what the devastating effects would be if they did not do the thing I wanted, thereby raising the stakes of my need.

For example, in one of the final scenes of the play, my mother-in-law Izzy accuses Nell of being a traitor for corresponding with Germans. I respond to this accusation with the following lines: “What is happening to us? Ricky didn’t go to war for this. Neighbor against neighbor?” (Zeder 72). In that moment, my point of view on Izzy is that the war has turned her into a tyrant and she is putting all of her energy on bringing down a supposed traitor when she should really be grieving and honoring her son. My need is to get Izzy’s face to soften, for her to look me in the eye and say something like, “you’re right – I’m ridiculous. This doesn’t matter. Ricky matters. Today should be about Ricky.” If she says this, then Ricky’s death will have been meaningful; though having him dead is the worst possible thing that could ever have

happened to me, the silver lining is that it might get his mother to wake up and treat people with more kindness. Thus, when Izzy disregards my plea and declares she is going to Dug Hill with the intention to accuse Nell, the impact for me is huge. Her tyrannical, war-like act is proof that Ricky's death *was* indeed meaningless and the blow of her decision to rampage up to Dug Hill is doubly devastating.

Points of Connection

While analyzing the text in preparation for rehearsals, I began to identify points of connection between June's experience and my own. My deeply resonant connection to my now deceased grandmother became a personal and powerful opportunity for me to enter the play personally. I inundated my acting notebooks with her photographs and segments from her line-a-day journals and my play process evolved into a dedication to her life. Another point of connection between June's world and my own is the tension between needing to stay present in current circumstances while dealing with anxiety, predictions, and fears about prospective ones. I experience this tension in my own life as I try to balance being present in the final moments of my graduate study while simultaneously putting an eye toward future plans. June is surrounded by so much communal worry and fear over the future, that focusing on the minutiae of the present becomes a coping mechanism. The mundane details of life like going to the store, making tea, and connecting with other members of the town are strategies for June to ground herself in the moment.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

The rehearsal process for *The Edge of Peace* was smooth and enjoyable. Director Linda Hartzel created a fun, relaxed atmosphere in the rehearsal room. We did no table work and were on our feet blocking by the second day of rehearsal. I was expecting that the rehearsal process would include some type of discussion or exploration of character relationships, worldview, and environment, but the entirety of the rehearsal process was devoted to getting the play on its feet so the playwright could see the work in its entirety. My intensive preparation served me in this situation, as I had already clarified my point of view and needs. Because the blocking was given to us before we had a chance to explore our impulses, however, I often found myself needing to create motivation for certain physical moves. Once we ran scenes and did run-throughs, Hartzel gave notes.

One of Hartzel's notes for me was to play against the emotional weight of Ricky's death. When Ricky is killed at the beginning of Act II, she specifically requested that I not allow the shock of the news to register too emotionally; Hartzel justified this note because the play is for young audiences and she did not want the beginning of Act II to be too "depressing." This note offered me a great challenge, as it was not my instinctual approach to the scene. Initially I played the scene using a personalization from my own life, allowing the news of Ricky's death to land on me emotionally the way I imagined it would be like to find out over telegram that the person I loved most in the world had been killed – a momentary punch in the gut that is at once messy, horrifying, shocking, unbelievable – and then a subsequent attempt to fight my way out of the emotion. After

receiving the news, my thought process as June moved to what had happened to him and how he died, resulting in a barrage of mental images. I was able to use the battle footage I had viewed in my research as mental movie clips that flashed through my mind. The visualizing of these bloody moments fueled my emotional response to the news.

Feeling the devastating emotions and then fighting my way out of them made sense to me, and I disagreed with Hartzel's request that I suppress my initial emotional response to my husband dying. However, since it is my responsibility to accommodate the director's needs, I found a way to adjust my point of view on Izzy and justify a smaller reaction. I decided that Izzy needed me to give her strength to deal with the tragedy and not collapse into despair, and therefore it was important that I appear strong in order to give her the support she needed. Thus, whatever I may have been experiencing in response to the initial news – shock, sadness, and disbelief – became an obstacle I had to overcome in order to help Izzy cope. Even though I made this shift in my point of view, I found it continually challenging through the run to keep my response minimal in this moment and admittedly allowed the emotional weight of the moment to land with increasing impact as the run progressed.

Another note Hartzel gave me during the moment of Ricky's death was to keep whatever responses I was having "internal" and not to look at the fourth wall. I learned how to use the fourth wall from my first year acting class with Professor Lee Abraham, and it is a technique I find useful during select moments onstage. Normally I create a vivid picture (usually using images I have found in research and my imagination of what

is on the fourth wall in the context of the environment) and then have it available as a place on which to place my focus. I experienced a similar moment receiving the news my father had died onstage while playing the Princess of France during *Love's Labour's Lost* in the spring of 2012. In the case of that production, I found it useful to collect the inner images connected to my personalization of that moment and actually imagine them on the fourth wall, thus allowing the audience to experience the moment with me by seeing on my face whatever emotional response to the news the images stimulated. Linda requested that we never look out, and also requested that I look at the floor at various moments throughout the play. Keeping my eyes on the floor was a habit I had been trying to break because of notes from other professors, and it was now being specifically requested of me. This request offered me an additional opportunity to exercise my professional and technical flexibility. I trusted and deeply respected Linda, and my fondness for her made it easy to incorporate her adjustments simply and enthusiastically, regardless of whether they were my first instincts.

In rehearsal I placed great attention on June's discoveries and how I could use my imagination to enhance their surrounding circumstances. As I do for most processes, I created a list of the discoveries I make in the play and tracked all of the new information coming to me. An Uta Hagen technique I found useful was to enhance my preparation for a scene by filling myself up with the opposite of whatever I was to discover onstage. For example, preparing for the aforementioned scene revealing Ricky's status as KIA, I found it useful to come onstage with deep and specific loving feelings for him. Though I varied my preparation for the scene throughout the run, I would often imagine Ricky had

come home and that I was setting two places at the table in order to share his favorite lunch with him. When Buddy calls my name to come outside, I imagined he was interrupting my preparation of this meal. Later, toward the end of Act II and still the same day, I enter the store to find other characters zealously declaring Nell a traitor. I imagined that I was coming into the store to talk to Izzy about the funeral, and how I wanted to plan the most beautiful and meaningful memorial service, making sure to have daffodils (Ricky's favorite) and brownies (his beloved dessert). The emotional impact of discovering other characters' negative energy was deepened by the lovely images I had imagined moments before; hearing Izzy's tyrannical accusations of Nell when we *just* found out Ricky died was jarring and harsh, offering powerful motivation for my outburst at the end of the scene.

RUNNING THE SHOW

The most impactful learning in this process was watching Professor Fran Dorn play Nell Hicks and act in scene with her. Having the opportunity not only to watch Fran utilize the acting techniques she teaches but to experience them firsthand was transformative and deeply educational. In her class Fran tirelessly reminds her students that actors have a responsibility to their scene partners to get them to their next beat, to the end of the scene, and to where they need to be emotionally. I had one major scene with Fran during the play and *every single time* we played the scene her presence, openness, and focus on her partners affected me authentically and deeply. Having been quiet for most of the scene, I (as June) end the scene by thanking Nell for her

extraordinary kindness. Each night I felt fueled by an overwhelming sense of compassion to play my action – to touch Nell’s heart with my deep gratitude – effortlessly and honestly every performance, and I attribute this to Fran’s deep commitment to her scene partners throughout the scene.

I developed a daily physical and vocal warm-up that served the needs of my role and maintained my craft and consistency throughout the run. Warm-ups are sacred and significant aspects of my preparation for performance, and doubly necessary throughout the run of this show as many of the performances were in the early morning. My *Edge of Peace* warm-up began with a few minutes of improvisational dance to 1940s music, followed by a gentle physical warm-up to warm my muscles, release tension, and increase energy flow. My physical warm-up for this production was adapted from Lecturer Laquetta Carpenter’s actor’s warm-up, with some added yoga and Pilates. Following my physical warm-up, I completed a modified version of Professor Barney Hammond’s vocal warm-up. Though I varied the exercises on a daily basis, I always included exercises to free and release my voice, allow my breath to flow freely, connect to support, activate a forward placement, and sharpen the muscularity of my speech. I would culminate the warm-up by incorporating lines of text from the play with some type of physical movement. In addition to preparing my body and voice for performance, my warm-up is an essential time for me to become present, grounded, and focused on the world of the play.

My work in the play evolved greatly throughout the run. As is true for me in all

projects, I continued to focus on various aspects of my character, and to try new things and different approaches until the last performance. Bogart observes in *A Director Prepares* that “the unconscious repetition of familiar territory is never vital or exciting” and that during an artistic process we must attempt to “remain awake and alive in the face of our inclinations towards habit” (130). The best way for me to avoid falling into habit and to remain “awake and alive” while performing the show eight times a week is to work tirelessly at improving and deepening my work while honoring the director’s structure, blocking, and vision. I do this by attempting to refine moments, strengthen my point of view, invite myself to more fully relax, and enhance my listening and attention. Each day I would select one or two different moments with which to explore and refine, and I would make notes about what was successful and unsuccessful after each show.

The most meaningful part of the entire process was its connection to Suzan Zeder’s body of work as a playwright for young audiences. Suzan’s presence in the room was energizing, supportive, and deeply passionate, and she always wanted to hear feedback from actors regarding what it felt like on the inside of the premise. Having the opportunity to participate in the readings of the other plays in the trilogy was illuminating – though I had read them in preparation for rehearsal and though my character was not in either of the other plays, experiencing them with the other cast members informed our work on *The Edge of Peace*. The opportunity to celebrate Suzan, her contributions to theatre for young audiences, and her retirement rooted my work in a purpose much larger than myself.

Taking the show to Seattle was the other highlight of the process. Not only did I fall in love with the city and its inhabitants, but the opportunity to be in a professional environment and work outside the confines of school was refreshing and energizing. Additionally, having the opportunity to focus completely on acting full time reminded me of my life before graduate school and ignited my excitement for my re-entry into the professional world.

CHAPTER TWO: Reflections on Training

INTRODUCTION

The second part of my thesis addresses the ways in which my overall experience in the three-year MFA acting program at the University of Texas at Austin has contributed to the growth of my art and craft. While in the program I was offered extraordinary, challenging, and diverse performing opportunities including (in chronological order) the title role in *Junie B. Jones* (dir. Steven Dietz), Polly in *Threepenny Opera* (dir. Halena Kays), Betsy/Lindsey in *Clybourne Park* (dir. Lucien Douglas), Actor/facilitator in *The Sexy Sex Kind of Sex* (dir. Lynn Hoare), Varya in *The Cherry Orchard* (dir. Brant Pope), Elizabeth in *Jekyll and Hyde* (dir. Will Davis), Janis Joplin in *The Chronicles of Badass Women* (dir. Will Davis), The Princess of France in *Love's Labor's Lost*, (dir. John Langs), Mrs. Parker in *Mariachi Girl* (dir. Brant Pope), and June in *The Edge of Peace* (dir. Linda Hartzel), in addition to several readings and workshops. Creating these roles affected my artistic growth most profoundly, and the following sections will reference the aforementioned productions and collaborations as they relate to various other aspects of my acting process.

THE ART OF LETTING GO

In my graduate school application personal statement, I discussed a need to inhabit an environment in which my artistry could evolve and flourish. I wrote: “Martha Graham urges artists to keep open the ‘channel’ through which the work can flow, and I desire nothing more than the gift of time, guidance, colleagues, and space to articulate and broaden my channel” (1). Little did I know that Graham’s notion that artists cannot force the work to happen would become one of the central focuses of my journey in graduate school. During my first few months of training I realized how much result-oriented acting was a part of my prior practice as an artist. The combination of my dance background and achievement-oriented personality had resulted in practices of *making* the moments happen rather than *allowing* them. Nearly all of my notes from my professors related to my need to let go of results: “You know what you’re doing, you’re just trying too hard,” “You’re a puppet-master,” “I just need you to let go, Liz. Just...let go!” Determined to “fix my problem” I embarked on a mission to more ably accomplish the task of letting go. Unfortunately, telling this to myself further complicated the process, as I then became the actor *trying really hard* to relinquish control.

I quickly realized my usual tools of determination and will power were completely ineffectual in this instance, and I felt lost, frustrated and unnerved. I was searching for an answer, a secret, or some way to fix my problem, and I was furious at my professors for not being able to teach me how to do it. The gift of having specific “problems” in actor training, however, is that though the problems can almost rarely be

“solved,” the resulting insights, tools, and new understandings that make their way into the actor’s consciousness can be profound and growth-filled. Thus began my deep and boundless journey toward myself, presence, and the rest of my life.

I scoured the books of theatrical and spiritual thinkers, finding solace in others’ experiences and the realization that “my” problem was actually one of the biggest challenges facing artists and humans alike. Nearly every line of Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen and the Art of Archery* seemed to speak to my experience. When the archery Master tells Hagel the he must not “consider how to carry it out,” and that “the shot will only go smoothly takes the archer himself by surprise,” I thought to myself, “but how can he not *think??*” (29). Having been raised in an environment where the intellect dominated, I marveled at the perplexity of “not thinking” and realized how deeply attached I was to using thought patterns in my own artistic doings. Bogart posits that the act of listening can help steer us away from results and argues “the effort to force something to happen makes listening impossible.” She likens rehearsal to playing on a Ouija board, “where you collectively put your hands on a question and then follow the movement as it starts to unfold (125).”

Slowly, and perhaps a bit slyly, moments of presence began to appear in my work. For the first time in my artistic life, I learned how to treat myself gently and approach my work with tenderness. Garnering compassion toward myself was necessary because if I tried to pin down or cling to whatever was happening to me, I knew it would start to disappear again. I began to track specific conditions when I felt this new sense of being in the moment. Meisner repetition and improvisations taught me that putting all of

my attention on my partner became one of the fastest ways to clearing the chatter from my own head. In addition to Meisner work, I found a variety of movement techniques to be activators of release in my work. Authentic Movement, Viewpoints, Body Mind Centering, Alexander Technique, Suzuki, Clown, and Mask work all offered pathways toward freedom. Approaching plays from a movement perspective unlocks discoveries for me; I observed how easy it was for me to take risks, to be vulnerable, and to be in the moment in movement work. Understanding this truth about myself has been helpful in the ways in which I prepare for roles and scene work outside of rehearsal.

Voice work was also an instrumental factor in my journey toward letting go. The concepts of allowing and receiving unlocked a new way of working; during the daily voice workouts, I realized that if I committed to opening myself up and supporting my voice with my breath, I began to receive the text rather than force it. Getting “out of my head” felt more effortless in voice workouts and coachings than it did in acting class. Professor Barney Hammond introduced the practice of “walking the text,” a tool I now use consistently to drop the text into my body. This exercise involves walking as you speak the lines of a text, allowing pulses within the thoughts to change your movement pattern and the directions in which you walk. After a powerful vocal warm-up and series of walking the text exercises, I often felt deeply emotionally connected to the material in ways I had not been able to achieve through other more traditional methods of accessing emotion. Voice and movement work allow me to fully integrate my breath, body, voice, heart, and intentions, and working from this type of holistic approach aides my ability to allow the work to flow through me.

I was blessed to have Janis Joplin as another powerful teacher in letting go. In the University New Theatre Festival in January of 2012, I played Janis in the world premiere of graduate playwrighting student Holli Gipson's *The Chronicles of Badass Women*. I was shocked and astounded that anyone would cast someone like me to play such a famously uninhibited, impulsive, and audacious woman. From the moment I entered the role, however, I felt complete freedom, a sense of adventure, and an unusual confidence; I attribute these feelings to some combination of the artistic team's unwavering faith in my abilities and Janis's energy rising from the grave. The more I dove into the role, the more I realized the extraordinary opportunity she gave me to explore my presence, instinct, physicality, and ability to be in the moment. Inspired by Janis, I made a conscious promise to myself as I rehearsed that I would allow the creative "manager" inside my head to take a backseat to the inspiration of the moment. I had never before felt so connected to my impulses, nor had I ever felt so in my body as I did during this role. Inhabiting Janis was an extraordinary teacher, and the opportunity to interact with the audience during the play's long monologues offered me feelings of freedom, presence, and spontaneity that I had yet to experience on stage.

Playing Polly Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera* during my first year of training allowed me a similar uninhibited experience and the space to feel as if the work was flowing through me. Because I played the role before our training had fully immersed me in specific techniques, I felt out of my head and connected to my instincts. Once we moved into the second year of training and received extremely specific and sometimes opposing acting methods from different professors, my obligation to *achieve* the

technique that I was being taught depending on which professor was in the room or the audience blocked my ability to allow the work to flow freely.

Though I always find points of contact between myself and my characters, theatrically heightened roles (like Polly Peachum) that feel fairly dissimilar from my personality and worldview often feel like the most accessible and easiest opportunities for me to allow and let go. While working on vocal studies of characters like Edie Beale and Amber from *The Real Housewives of South Boston*, I have felt a similar ease. Perhaps the ease comes from an exhilaration, freedom, and sense of play I experience while playing characters whose experiences differ drastically from my own. I find it more painful to play those characters with whom I share much in common.

CULTIVATING AUTHENTICITY

Do you.

Charlie Kaufman

In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brooks writes about the balance of activities necessary to an actor's participation in a play process:

There is a place for discussion, for research, for the study of history and documents as there is a place for roaring and howling and rolling on the floor. Also, there is a place for relaxation, informality, chumminess, but there is a time for silence and discipline and intense concentration (125).

This diversity of energies and activities is part of what draws me to acting and absolutely what keeps me fulfilled in the development of the craft. Graduate school

helped articulate that part of why I act is because this art form offers the opportunity to integrate all parts of myself, all aspects of my personality, and a variety of my passions. I am endlessly challenged and fulfilled by exploring the balance between my heart, mind, and body and I believe this exploration is essential to my ability to dynamically live truthfully under imaginary circumstances and create the most amount of “life” in the “work of art” (Donnellan 3).

Finding the craft of acting has felt like a coming home to my true nature. For the first time in my life all of the things about which I am passionate are integrated in a single form. From a young age I have been equally interested in moving my body, telling stories, exploring text, understanding history, assuming different points of view, exploring my emotional landscape, and teaching; for me, the study and practice of acting is the professional container in which I can house all of these interests. Furthermore, I bring my passion for and experience in all of these areas to each creative process. In *The Golden Buddha Changing Masks*, Mark Olsen claims that a “truly masterful” actor “utilizes every part of his being in order to expand his antennae of awareness and to live fully within two worlds at once” (93). I relish the opportunity to explore and utilize all aspects of myself in my work.

In graduate training, I have made the powerful realization that not only does it behoove me to bring all aspects of myself to my work, but that to do otherwise would result in a lack of authenticity. The curious paradox is that if I try to conceal certain aspects of myself or operate under any conceit other than brutal honesty about *my* true

person, the creation of a *character* is lackluster and false. Uta Hagen asserts in *Respect for Acting* that “the more an actor develops a full sense of his own identity, the more his scope and capacity for identification with other characters than his own will be made possible” (24). Much of my journey in Austin has been devoted to interrogating and developing this sense of self. I have found this endeavor to be both challenging and electrifying. I have experienced moments of profound struggle and exhilarating bliss, but as I have a particular fascination with the development and formation of identity and emotional patterns and behaviors, I have found deep fulfillment in all aspects of this self-discovery process.

This journey to a deeper self-awareness has progressed through a variety of doors, most notably movement work, voice work, and psychotherapy. The exploration of specific movement styles has allowed me to better access my impulses and instincts, work from an open-heart, and clarify and deepen my sense of aesthetics. I found the Viewpoints, Authentic Movement and Body-Mind-Centering work with Professor Tom Truss, as well as mask and clown work in the second year with Lecturer Laquetta Carpenter to be deeply useful in this exploration of myself and my artistry. I leave graduate school with multiple powerful experiences during movement improvisations that accessed deep wells of emotion, memories, and desires. Additionally, my own personal practice and study of yoga has been a powerful and consistent tool for uncovering deeper layers of myself and my patterns. Freeing and releasing my natural voice under the guidance of Professor Barney Hammond provided further opening and accessing of self. The act of cultivating my body to be an open channel through which I

can receive the text left me in cathartic tears during many an exercise. Lastly, my work with a psychotherapist off campus has had a profound impact on my increased understanding of how and why I operate the way I do in the world. Not only has therapy allowed me to more easily and healthily access emotional freedom in my work, but it also has provided a steady and candid mirror through which I can craft a holistic view of my identity.

My work in therapy and this final year of training have both led me to the acceptance phase of this newly interrogated and explored self. In *The Golden Buddha Changing Masks*, Mark Olsen observes, “healthy actors come to know that owning all of their humanity is the high-octane fuel for their craft and part of the formula for becoming an artist” (23). I learned that “owning” my humanity is an entirely different process than the mere exploration of it and that taking ownership for, standing behind, and believing in my identity called on a different type of emotional strength and resilience. My journey in actor training has shed light on and articulated numerous aspects of myself about which I had previously held judgment. Becoming comfortable with and naming these traits that have been points of past insecurity has been the first step toward acceptance. Having my personality reflected back so intensely and, at times, quite candidly by my cohort and faculty has been one of the most challenging experiences of my life. Having professors and colleagues name and at times attempt to change the less attractive aspects of myself – what they view as an insecure, overly-sensitive, self-deprecating, idealistic, overly optimistic, overly accommodating and over-achieving self – has been painful, debilitating, and emotionally destructive. Yet the powerful result of facing this adversity

has been that I have learned to fully embrace these qualities, stand up and advocate for them, and transform them into “high octane fuel” for my art. As E.E. Cummings advocates, I find the deepest authenticity as an artist when I work from a place where I am “nobody but (myself)” (E.E. Cummings Quotes).

Another result of the transformative experience of confronting a deeper sense of identity has been the development of a powerful emotional resilience. It is often said that actors need a thick, rhinoceros-like skin to survive in the business. I have always found this advice challenging, perhaps most importantly because as a human I feel that I have the literal *opposite* of a thick skin, but also since actors need this type of thin translucent outer shell to effectively play a scene. If I develop an impenetrable outer layer, then I lack the necessary vulnerability to let my partner affect me and my acting is poor. Yet if I am deeply affected by *everything* at all times, how will I emotionally survive the perils of the industry? Based on this logic I conclude that I need a skin that can transform on a dime. I can thus play a scene allowing myself to be affected by all stimuli and then grow instant emotional Teflon in order to receive highly critical notes and remain completely emotionally unaffected. Despite my attempts, however, I am unable to create this type of immediate transformation from egg-like vulnerability to rhinoceros-like hide.

Over the past three years, however, I have realized that embracing my true nature actually provides more emotional resilience and stability than pretending to have a thick skin. Furthermore, accepting my authentic self deepens my work as an artist. As Peter Brook writes about Jerzy Grotowski’s acting method:

The actor does not hesitate to show himself exactly as he is, for he realizes that the secret of the role demands his opening himself up, disclosing his own secrets. So that the act of performance is an act of sacrifice, of sacrificing what most men prefer to hide – this sacrifice is his gift to the spectator (59).

Rather than trying to become what I am not, embracing all sides of myself – however much I may want to keep them secret – deepens my work as a performer. Furthermore, fully accepting my personality allows me to remain a healthy and grounded artist. Anne Bogart asserts that “insecurity” is a “necessary ingredient” in the process of art making (131). I began the three-year journey with the intention to hide the insecure, vulnerable, and sensitive aspects of myself, and I complete it with the knowledge that I have no choice not only to embrace those qualities, but to fully utilize and bring them to my work; my authenticity is the greatest gift I can give the audience.

ACTOR WELLNESS: DISCIPLINE, RITUAL, AND INTEGRATION

Because I bring a large part of myself to my roles, I accept that a necessary part of the acting experience involves experiencing the residue of my characters’ emotional lives when I am outside of the theatre. I have experienced firsthand the disorienting, perilous, and, at times, emotionally destructive results of this aspect of the craft. Despite the many myths our society perpetuates about the necessity of being “crazy” and possibly even mentally unstable to be a “real” actor, I deeply believe that it is possible to be both a brilliant artist and an emotionally healthy human. I have spent the past three years

exploring and refining wellness and craft rituals that support my commitment to this endeavor.

The rituals of the daily entering and exiting of roles are a powerful and essential part of my artistic success and wellness. I have found it most useful to specifically tailor my warm-ups to the character I am playing and the theatrical world in which I am living. I have found the development of warm-ups to be a highly creative, grounding, and useful endeavor that has now become a deeply meaningful part of my process in preparing and playing a role. Additionally, the warm-ups have become a space for discovery, and I often gain insights about my character through the warm-up process. Donnellan argues “actors need discipline in order to be free”; the discipline and ritual of a warm-up empowers the most amount of freedom onstage (158).

In addition to serving as a necessary preparation for performance, I believe that warm-ups are an opportunity for me to continually develop, tune, and craft my instrument. My strong, open voice, and supple, free body are imperative to my success as an actor, and therefore need rigorous attention and development on a consistent basis. In *Speaking Shakespeare*, renowned voice coach Patsy Rodenberg tells the story of an actress who thought she did not need a strong instrument to fill a large theatre:

I once worked with a screen actress who was returning to the stage after a long break. She had to fill a theatre, and she said to me she thought it was all to do with intention. ‘No,’ I replied. ‘I might have the intention of being a pole-vaulter. I might see myself flying over that pole – but I couldn’t do it unless I’d worked certain muscles.’ Intention may be the start and even the end of the process, but in the middle there is work! (8).

Developing those body and vocal ‘muscles’ is a cornerstone of my acting process, and the warm-ups provide an excellent opportunity to keep my instrument finely tuned.

My warm-ups awaken and integrate my body, voice, and emotional life. They incorporate elements of voice work, Viewpoints, Suzuki, Authentic Movement, yoga, improvisational dance, and meditation. I allow the creation of the warm-up to be intuitive, allowing the process and character to guide me toward what will be most useful for entering. At the end of my warm-up I review some or all of the text of the piece, often accompanied by some sort of physical movement. For each role I play I create a playlist of music that reflects both the time period of the play and the essence of the character. I play the music throughout different physical aspects of the warm-up. Hagen writes that actors must “unclutter” themselves, and open themselves up to their “fullest capacity” – to give meaning to what they “receive” through their sensory experiences (64). For me, the warm-up opens me to this “full capacity,” awakening my senses and stripping away the “clutter.”

Essential to my being at my fullest and most open is my being in a relaxed state. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavsky urges actors to be “bold in throwing off as much tension as you possibly can...No matter how much you reduce tension, it will never be enough” (271). For me, relaxation is one of the secrets to my being able to open my heart and be vulnerable onstage. The relaxation of my body, voice, mind, and heart are directly related to my ability to deeply receive stimuli; I use techniques like yoga and meditation to prepare my body for this open state needed for performance. While acting *and* in life, I hold particular tension in my shoulders, forehead, mouth, and hands. During

rehearsal I often use gentle internal reminders to release these areas, in the hopes that I will train them to be open and relaxed during performance.

I also realized the need for an exiting ritual for certain projects. While developing the role of Elizabeth in Jeffrey Hatcher's *Jekyll and Hyde*, I became deeply affected in my life outside of the play by the terrorized journey of the character and I needed to develop strategies for shaking off the day's work so I could safely go home. A cool-down was necessary for this project, and after rehearsals and performances I utilized some gentle breathing techniques and calming stretching to allow myself to "take off" Elizabeth's devastating emotional life. During *Love's Labour's Lost* I would often sit in the dressing room after the show, prolonging my exit from the theatre. Because my journey as the Princess traversed such diverse emotional terrain, I found it helpful to take the time to quiet my nervous system after the show.

MAKING MY OWN STORIES

Some of the most surprisingly impactful experiences I have had during my three years involve creating and writing my own work. These experiences have brought strength and given voice to the stories I want to tell, as well as helped me to clarify and sharpen my personal aesthetics and values as a theatre practitioner. The themes I explored in different environments and class settings were always in dialogue with each other. I created a Personal History performance piece for Lecturer Laquetta Carpenter's class at the beginning of my second year, and the making of it unearthed emotional truths about the women in my family that became the basis for a full-length play I wrote in

Professor Kirk Lynn's playwrighting class. I created a solo performance piece for Professor Lynn's Directing New Work class in the style of choreographer and contemporary theatre maker Deborah Hay, and through the making of this piece I developed performance techniques that I utilized again in a piece for Professor Stephen Gerald's class in devising new work.

Though perhaps the smallest in scale, these pieces are some of the work I am most proud of making during my three years of training. I have found the act of creating my own work to be one of the most powerful ways to access my own emotional truth and vulnerability. While writing plays or creating performance pieces, I often inadvertently access and open valves containing rich wells of emotion that later prove useful playing roles in other plays. These acts of creation have empowered me to include creating my own work as a consistent part of my artistic practice; I plan to continue and deepen these explorations as I move forward in my artistic journey.

WHAT I BELIEVE

In *Respect For Acting*, Uta Hagen urges actors to "set (their) own goals" for their own "approval," rather than to please others (18). As I move forward in my work beyond graduate school, I hope to continue to set my own goals as an artist, human, and professional, following my intuition and inner guidance rather than pandering to what I believe others expect of me. Mark Olsen asserts that if actors take their focus away from "making it," and more on the growth and development of their own artistry, "a new flow

of energy that *makes it in every moment* will emerge. The fame and fortune carrot will dissolve in favor of the *feast of the now*” (142).

Inspired by Hagen, Olsen, and the growth and exploration I have experienced in graduate school, I developed the following manifesto as a personal guide to bringing the maximum amount of presence and freedom to my work. As I move forward in my artistic life I hope to task myself with the challenge of “making it in every moment,” and the following are thoughts on how I can best accomplish this intention, knowing full well that they will evolve and change as I deepen my artistry:

1. I am present, my heart is open, and I am open to all possible outcomes
2. I bring all parts of my authentic self to the work: all of my humanity, talents, emotions, experiences, and memories, and I allow myself to be fully seen by colleagues and audience alike
3. I work harder than I think I possibly can; being exceptionally prepared allows me the freedom to be exceptionally present
4. I listen first - to the play, my scene partners, and my collaborators
5. I open my heart to fear, messiness, and failure
6. Rather than aiming for results, I create conditions in which something might happen
7. I bring a fully integrated voice, body, heart, and mind to my work and support this effort with consistent and rigorous training
8. I bring my imagination and a buoyant sense of play to rehearsal
9. I contribute positive energy to this industry and keep the theatre “clean” by interacting whole-heartedly and compassionately with colleagues and collaborators
10. I commit to creating transformative theatre that can help enlarge and heal the hearts and spirits of my collaborators and society

CONCLUSION

Actors have the unique opportunity to adopt many points of view over a single life-time, providing a much wider spectrum of understanding than normally available...The craft at this level becomes a religious experience; ...a deep revelatory thrill at the interconnectedness of people, events, history, art, music, life, death, and the beyond. Voluntarily assuming various points of view, if done fully and with complete conviction, eventually erodes the barnacles of prejudice and gently seasons the soul toward compassion and further growth.

- Mark Olsen

In my graduate school application personal statement, I consider the usefulness and necessity of actors in an ailing world, a line of inquiry that has accompanied me throughout my professional life, writing that I have always “been mindful of my ‘use’ in society,” and that I often “consider how my donning of a costume helps heal our diseased environment, population, and national peace” (1). I conclude the statement by expressing a desire to create work that is meaningful and a potential change agent in society. Citing Tennessee Williams’ line in *Camino Real* – “the violets in the mountains have broken the rocks” – I write that “while others strengthen the community’s roads and healthcare,” I will “break the rocks” by tending “to its heart and spirit, first by listening to its cadence, and then by intensifying, poking fun, distorting, or sometimes softening its melody” (1). Three years later, my original intention is intact; I deeply desire to help heal, transform, and contribute to the positive growth of other humans with my art. The question remains, is it possible? Am I capable? Can actors serve society?

I realized that in order to tend and listen to my *community's* heart and spirit, I first needed to tend to my *own*. Devoting the last three years to my own growth and development, I have developed a newfound compassion for myself as well as a belief in my own artistry. Bogart examines the interconnectedness inherent to the development of an artist's art and life, noting that one's "growth as an artist is not separate from (one's) growth as a human being" (118). As I reflect on the major themes of the past three years of training, I realize the impossibility of separating the two. As I develop my ability to listen and receive in an acting scene, my ability to communicate in my personal relationships improves. As I learn to celebrate the present moment through meditation and release the need to achieve results in my life's plan, the vitality of my scene work deepens.

I act because I believe the daily practices of presence, listening, connecting to the other, imagination, creating intentions while letting go of results, and a disciplined integration and continual opening of mind, body, voice, and heart make me a more alive human. I believe fully alive actors have the power to transform audiences to live more present, vital lives. I believe that the process of making theatre, when accomplished with intention and compassion, can help transform and heal us as theatre artists. Olsen asserts that "the moment to moment mindfulness of an actor...can inspire an audience to experience the work with that same rarefied level of attention... we are suddenly reminded that there exists only the eternal now in an infinite here" (109).

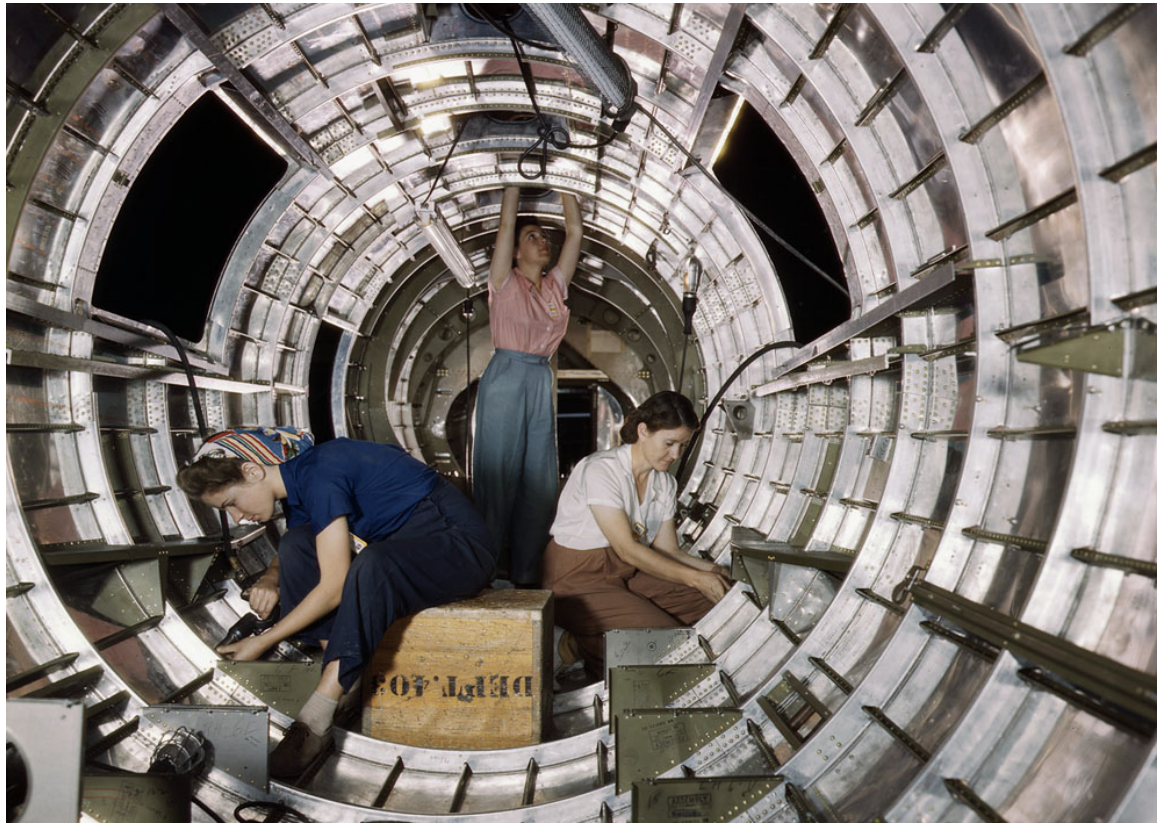
Before graduate school, I was unaware of the power of "moment to moment mindfulness" and did not know how to bring it to my work on a daily basis. Three years

later, I feel more present, more connected to my own humanity, and a more able listener than when I entered school. Furthermore, I have a set of craft tools that allow me to feel capable of approaching any text, style, or project. Will these qualities enable me to create work that incites positive change in my colleagues, society, and the world? Will my performances inspire audiences to live with deeper presence and greater compassion? Though the answers are unknown, I feel profoundly ready to leap into the field with these intentions and have a keen desire to investigate their relevance fully and with deep commitment. I am dedicated to creating theatre that is meaningful in the lives of others. I am ready to break the rocks.

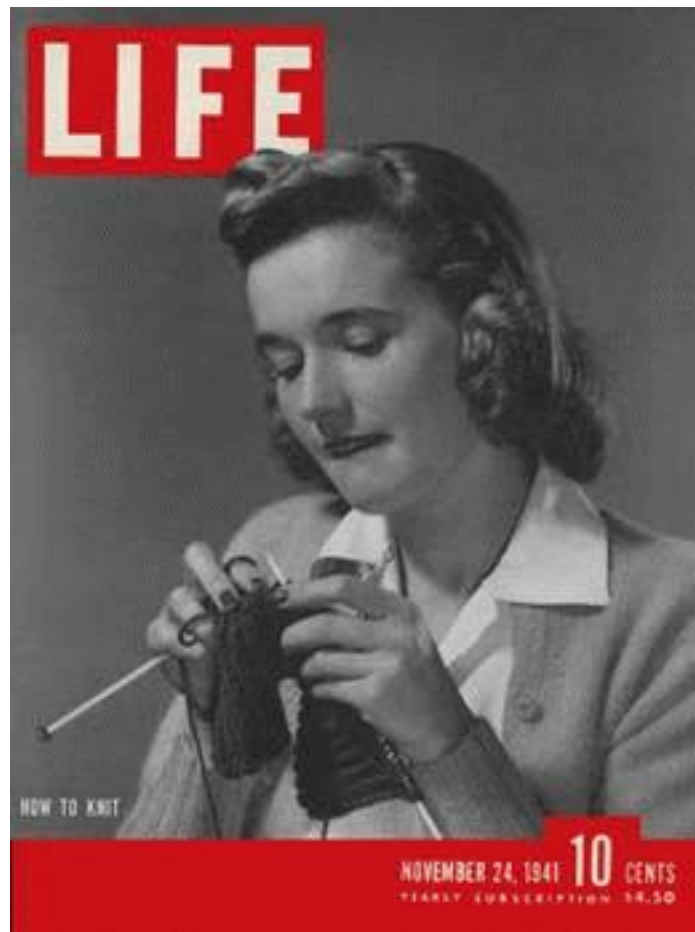
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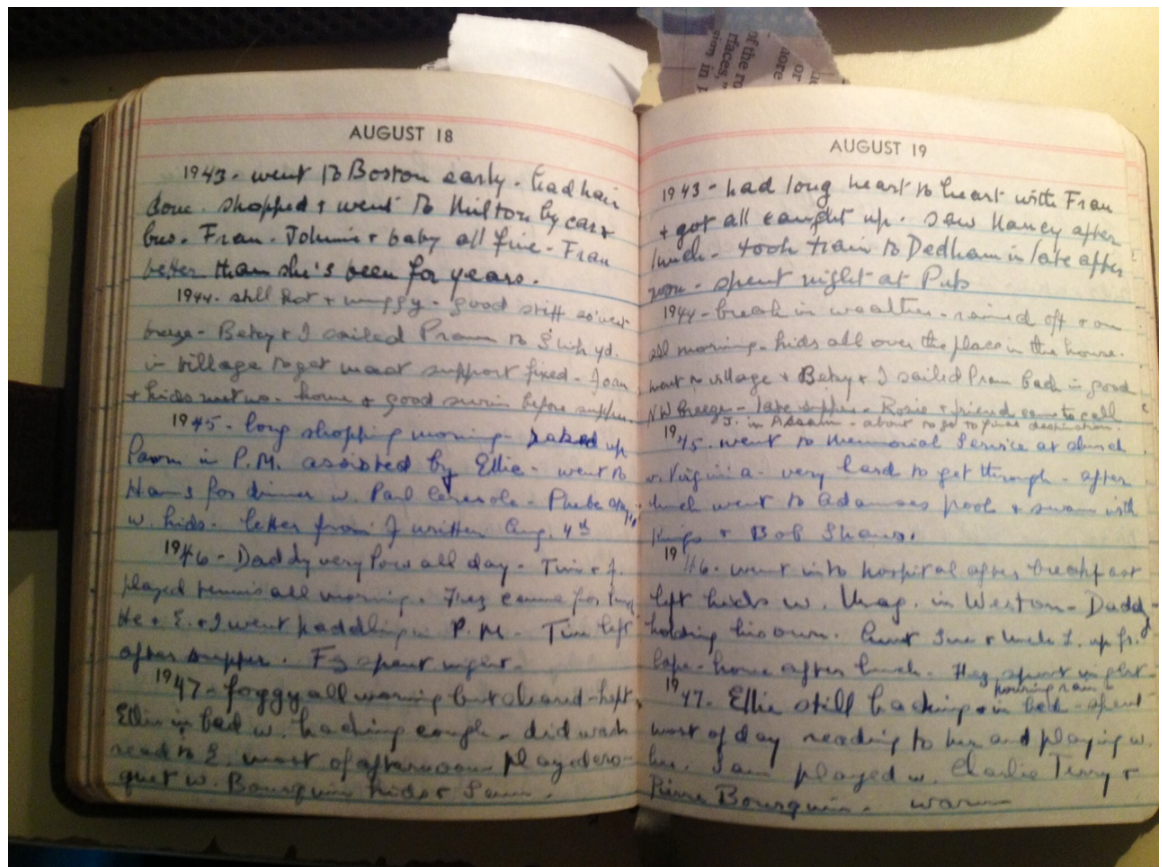
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Grandmother's Line-A-Day Diary



Letter from Grandfather to Grandmother, WW II



Photo of Grandparents, 1940s

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Vita

Liz Kimball is a New York based actress, writer, and teacher. A member of Actor's Equity since 2008, Liz graduated with high honors from Northwestern University as a Theatre/English double major with a certificate in Music Theatre. She has performed extensively in New York and at regional theatres throughout the country including Papermill Playhouse, McCarter Theatre Center, Walnut Street Theatre, The York Theatre, La MaMa ETC, Franklin Stage, and Weston Playhouse, among many others. Liz has originated roles in a multitude of world premieres, including Suzan Zeder's *The Edge of Peace*, Jackson Rep's critically acclaimed *167 Tongues*, and The Music Theatre Company's *Erika's Wall*. Liz is an original ensemble member with The Music Theatre Company, where she conceived, co-wrote, and directed *HappyFoods*, a world premiere musical about the food industry in America. Liz is the recipient of an Austin Critic's Table Award, an Austin Live Theatre Recognition, and an AriZoni nomination, as well as the Sarah Siddons and Joe Miller Scholarships at Northwestern University. In Austin she has performed at The Zach Scott Theatre, Hyde Park Theatre, and Paramount Theatre, as well as in numerous independent films and commercials. As an educator Liz has taught acting, voice, and music theatre techniques at Mount Holyoke College, Northwestern University High School Institute, The University of Texas at Austin, The Zach Scott Theatre, the Paramount Theatre, and Project Creo in Quito, Ecuador. Liz coaches acting and voice privately and has served as the voice and dialogue coach for UT Austin's *The Cataract*, *And then Came Tango*, and Hyde Park Theatre's *A Steady Rain*.

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